

First Thessalonians 5:21

- 5:21 Paul commands them to carefully examine and test teachers and teachings they did hear.**
1. Having taught their duty to receive, esteem, and desire sound doctrine from their teachers (5:20), Paul exhorts them to the Christian duty of confirming the teachings.
 - a. **Prove.** To make trial of, try, test. To make trial of, put to the test; to try the genuineness or qualities of; to try, test. **Try.** To ascertain, find out (something doubted, obscure, or secret) by search or examination; to sift out.
 - b. The command is not to second-guess politicians with *American Opinion* or *The Spotlight*, to compare appliances with *Consumer Reports*, or to analyze business strategies with “what-if” financial modeling. It is the “things” of Acts 17:11, which are the “things” taught by the prophesyings of verse 20. God does not care about politicians, appliances, or business ventures – they are all vanity.
 - c. Christians have a God-given duty to check preachers and teachers by the Bible.

 2. Because we exalt authoritative and dogmatic preaching, we are accused of being a cult.
 - a. “Cult” is simply a childish slur with a moving definition used by ignorant fools.
 - b. **Cult.** A particular form or system of religious worship; esp. in reference to its external rites and ceremonies.
 - c. These enemies who use the word cannot define it meaningfully; and when they make the attempt, it would condemn most every authority in most every setting.
 - d. Because they know they don’t have any truth, they are paranoid of it; since truth would condemn their manmade definitions, opinions, and jobs, they want to condemn anyone who believes they do have truth. Quite perverted, isn’t it?
 - e. They condemn us for criticizing the doctrine and practices of others, but they cannot even recognize that is all they do when criticizing us, and that falsely.
 - f. Roman Catholics hold papal infallibility, baby sprinkling, Limbo, celibacy for priests and nuns, required fasts, no mixed marriages, no salvation outside Rome, the soul-probing confessional, fee-based services, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and many more controlling doctrines; yet cultphobes never attack them as a cult, showing Satan’s use and approval of both them and Rome. Never has there been a Christian sect with more mind control than Catholicism.
 - g. Paul was accused of heresy, but it didn’t bother him much at all (Acts 24:14).
 - h. If men think highly of us, it proves we are abominable to God (Luk 6:26; 16:15).
 - i. If they blindly reject confidence in Scripture and our God-given responsibility to judge heresy and offences, they can jump or fall into their ditch (Matt 15:14).
 - j. Jesus was warned of offending the Pharisees, but He didn’t care (Mat 15:12-14).
 - k. We are thankful to be a cult of New Testament worship of Jesus Christ, for it places us in His company with the apostles and marks those who use it as fools.

 3. We do not follow any man or religious system blindly, due to the command of this text.
 - a. We are not a “cult” in any evil way or a distorted church of blinded believers.
 - b. Paul here commanded them to test and prove the teachings they heard and to accept, believe, and obey only that which was good according to the Scriptures.
 - c. The Bereans were “noble” for checking Paul’s inspired teachings by the Scriptures, how much more should we check uninspired preachers (Acts 17:11)!
 - (1) Though Paul did great miracles, they proved him anyway (Deut 13:1-5).

- (2) The best of men are but men at best, so all men must be carefully proved.
 - (3) They searched the Scriptures to confirm his words as either truth or not; they did not measure by feelings, opinions, traditions, experiences, etc.
 - (4) And this noble activity of hearing and proving was a daily exercise.
 - (5) Since we have the Scriptures in every home and on every lap, we can prove things more easily, even while the message is being presented.
 - (6) Wise saints will observe the Bereans heard Paul with very ready minds.
 - d. The only criterion for truth is Holy Scripture, and it demands our dogmatism (Psalm 119:128; Is 8:20; Gal 1:6-9; I Tim 6:3-5; II Tim 3:16-17; II Pet 1:19-21).
 - e. We do not measure truth by popularity, longevity, authority, or familiarity; these and all other substitutes for Holy Scripture must be rejected as vain and foolish.
 - f. We are Bible Christians, and we must often maintain this privately and publicly; for there is no other basis for truth, godliness, and true religion than Scripture.
 - g. Only the foolish simple believe every word, and we reject that (Pr 14:15). We are not dummies following a charismatic dictator or a threatening organization.
 - h. We let God be true, and every man a liar, even ourselves (Romans 3:4; Jer 17:9).
4. There were great reasons to prove and test prophets, their teachings, and their writings.
- a. Jesus warned His apostles of false prophets using His name (Matt 7:15; 24:24).
 - b. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus of false teachers like wolves (Acts 20:29-31).
 - c. He also described many who were already corrupting God's Word (II Cor 2:17).
 - d. H warned of Satan's false apostles teaching another Jesus (II Cor 11:2-4,13-15).
 - e. He had to deal with false brethren on a regular basis (II Cor 11:26; Gal 2:1-5).
 - f. Paul warned the Ephesians by epistle of cunningly crafty deceivers (Eph 4:14).
 - g. False epistles were being forged, even to these Thessalonians (II Thess 2:1-2).
 - h. Paul warned Timothy about false teachers creeping after women (II Tim 3:6-9).
 - i. Paul exhorted Titus to shut the mouths of subversive teachers (Titus 1:9-11).
 - j. Peter also warned of damned false teachers that would creep in (II Peter 2:1-3).
 - k. And Jude also warned of these reprobates and their profane gospel (Jude 1:4).
 - l. John's loving name for them was "antichrists," and there were many (I Jn 2:18).
5. John exhorted his readers to try every spirit and teacher, even apostles (I John 4:1-6).
- a. Notice the plain directive to not believe every spirit, or every preacher (v1).
 - b. John directed them to determine if their teachers were of God or were false (v1).
 - c. The problem was widespread and serious – there were many false prophets (v1).
 - d. How do you try spirits? Check the teacher by his doctrine. It is that simple (v2).
 - e. Observe and remember that you do not try the preacher by your gut feel (v2).
 - f. The Holy Spirit is known by correct doctrine, not warm and fuzzy feelings (v2).
 - g. If they didn't agree with apostolic doctrine of Christ, they were antichrist (v3).
 - h. There is more than one spirit in the world. We cannot forget it (v3; II Cor 11:4).
 - i. This standard of doctrinal criteria can be applied to all things (v3; Ps 119:128).
 - j. This is a spiritual war manifested by doctrine, which we have already won (v4).
 - k. And those walking in the Spirit will be preserved from lies and persecution (v4).
 - l. Their persons, doctrines, and ambitions are compatible with the world and its carnal orientation with a false spirituality, but God's saints reject them all (v5).
 - m. How do we find truth and God's true saints? By apostolic doctrine – "us" (v.6).
6. The church at Ephesus had put this into practice and found them liars (Revelation 2:2).

7. As much now as ever, or even more than ever due to the present information explosion, we are bound to examine every teacher and teaching at the tribunal of Holy Scripture.
 - a. We are assaulted by more ideas, theories, doctrines, and teaching than ever.
 - b. The perilous times of the last days would include our present information explosion and multiplication of teachers with a great void of truth (II Tim 3:1-7).
 - c. These perilous times would see fables replacing sound doctrine by a heaping pile of false teachers and charlatans funded by carnal Christians (II Tim 4:1-4).
 - d. The cure was simple for God's ministers – the Holy Scriptures (II Tim 3:8-17).
 - e. It is by faithful preachers that men are saved from these errors (Eph 4:11-14).
 - f. Regardless of how well received, how graciously presented, how nobly sounding, how anciently affirmed, we must reject all but plain Bible doctrine.
 - g. If we test other things out before purchasing or using, how much more religion?

8. Once we identify and confirm the truth of God, we will not let it go for anything at all.
 - a. **Fast.** Firmly fixed in its place; not easily moved or shaken; settled, stable.
 - b. Holding fast is setting it as fixed and final and not modifying it for anything.
 - c. We buy the truth, which actually comes free by grace, and sell it not (Pr 23:23).
 - d. We earnestly contend for it against all opposition, for the truth of God was once delivered to the saints – truth is not developing (Jude 1:3; Gal 2:5; Titus 1:9-11).
 - e. We will answer those we judge sincere (Prov 9:8-10; 22:20-21; 26:5; I Pet 3:15).
 - f. We will not answer those we judge to be scorers (Mat 7:6; 15:12-14; Pro 9:6-8; 26:4; II Thess 3:1-2; II Timothy 2:16,23; I Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 6:4-5; Titus 3:9).